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ABSTRACT

Designed for parents who want to know what they can do to help their child have a good start in developing prereading skills and early reading development, this booklet provides parents with information that will help them give their child a maximum opportunity for success in reading. The booklet includes a list of reading readiness skills, suggestions for some developmental activities, suggestions on how to read a book to children, and answers to some common questions about reading. (RS)

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HOW TO HELP GROW A READER

BY

RONA F. FLIPPO

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BY

RONA F. FLIPPO

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RONA F. FLIPPO, EDITOR
LAURIE E. HAMILTON, ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR

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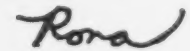
Dear Parents:

Many parents of young children are often concerned with their child's pre-reading skills and early reading development. These parents want to know what they can do to help their child have a good start in this very important area. All too often, parents do not have the knowledge available to them to help their child. This booklet is an attempt to provide parents with information that will help them give their child a maximum opportunity for success. Although each parent/child relationship should be treated individually, there are some pre-reading experiences which could be applicable with most family situations.

You may find that many of the ideas are not new or innovative for many of you. There may be experiences that you and your child already share. However, by calling your attention to the importance and reasons for the experiences, the experiences may make it that much more meaningful for you and your child's growth.

I hope you will find this booklet informative and useful. Good luck in growing your young readers!

Sincerely



Rona F. Flippo

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WHAT IS READING

Reading is not a simple act. It is a complex one that involves a series of mental processes. But the fact that it is complex does not mean that it is necessarily difficult to learn. Speaking is also a complex act, but most children learn to speak without a great deal of difficulty.

Children do not learn to read suddenly, or after only a few months of trying, as they might learn to ride their bikes. Instead they learn to read developmentally, or over an extended period of time. Experiences from babyhood and on provide children with a background of references and skills upon which they keep building.

When a child begins formal education in school, the teacher should begin instruction with the child according to the child's current level of development. Not every child has had the same past developmental experiences or learns in the same way or at the same rate.

But, can we define reading? The fact is, reading is not easy to define. Is it getting a clue to what several squiggles, or by guess or inference? Is it recognizing the meaning of a word, a phrase, or a sentence? Is it relating one's experiences to those of the writer? It is saying each word out loud or silently? It it a process of thinking that is stimulated by a special kind of object?

Perhaps it might be defined better in terms of what it does. It is a means by which a person's life is enriched? Or, is it a means by which a person's personality develops? Or, a means of gaining vital information? Or maybe, a means of escaping temporarily from reality?

The important thing to keep in mind is that reading is not as simple as decoding words or word recognition. It is primarily a thinking process activated by visual symbols and all that the child brings to the process.

If we take a nonsense word, for example, the word "soof," we can probably pronounce it. But it doesn't mean anything. We have no experience with it. We have never hard or spoken it before. We do not understand the word, so we are not really *reading* it. You might say we have decoded the word, but we haven't comprehended it.

Reading, which is a combination of decoding and comprehension, builds upon the previous experience and language skills of the child. There is much parents can do to enhance these experiences and language skills.

WHAT ABOUT READING READINESS SKILLS?

In many school instructional programs, reading readiness activities are usually planned for the five-and six-year-old children. However, we must remember that readiness is an ongoing developmental process. A child must develop the readiness for each successive step in learning to read, and this development should begin at babyhood, not at the "magic" age of five.

The readiness program from beginning reading instruction includes: expanding the child's experience background, giving the child opportunity for and experience in suing language orally, developing the child's powers of visual and auditory perception, teaching the child about books and how they work (for example, left to right, top to bottom, one page at a time), and helping the child learn to work with others but also to be able to do tasks independently and completely.

Achieving a level of readiness is a basic concept in all learning. Readiness includes reaching the level of necessary maturity—mental, physical, emotional, and social—achieving the skills and abilities related to such maturity, and having an interest in what is to be learned. No child learns anything until he or she is ready for that learning.

A list of reading readiness skills will follow. These skills are generally accepted by reading specialists and early childhood specialists. Do not be concerned if a school system or a book with which you are familiar lists some different reading readiness skills, or uses different words to describe the skills. (As a matter of fact, it would be

surprising to find them listed in exactly the same way.) You see, while most specialists generally accept similar skills lists, most specialists, like most children, have a different experiential background. So, they express themselves in different ways. The skills have been organized into five areas; however, it is important to understand that most of these areas are interwoven and overlapping.

Your child does not develop these skills separately or in isolation. The skills are not arranged to be prerequisites for each other; they will develop as your child develops, in growth spurts with no suggested order. Use this wisely, do not *drill* your baby or young child, but instead, use it as a guide to shape some experiences for your youngster. These experiences can be planned so that your child can have opportunity to play with these skills and experiment with activities to develop these skills *when ready*.

The following list of reading readiness skills are some suggestions for early reading and language development activities with some recipes for muscle development and discussion. These activities and recipes will help you get started with experiences to enhance your child's skill development. But, these activities and recipes are by no means a complete menu. After you've become accomplished with them, develop some experiences and activities of your own for your child. Take note of the kinds of things (skills) your child is still developing. Figure out new activities, games, and conversations to provide your youngster with more opportunities for experiences that will help with the skills under development. Remember to keep it fun. Make it a conscious part of your lives together, but not *drill* activity.

A LIST OF READING READINESS SKILLS

Oral language Skills

- Recognizes word boundaries
- Uses adequate vocabulary
- Relates stories in sequence
- Expresses ideas in sentences
- Participates in discussions

Visual Discrimination Skills

- Recognizes likenesses and differences in manipulative objects and designs
- Can identify from memory pictures, objects, designs, after they have been shown
- Classifies objects and pictures
- Recognizes likenesses and differences in numbers, letters, and words
- Can reproduce numbers, letters, and words
- Can recognize and reproduce own name in manuscripts
- Can identify upper and lower case letters
- Can reproduce upper and lower case letters
- Recognizes colors and color names
- Follows picture and design sequence

Auditory Discrimination Skills

- Follows simple one and two-step directions
- Identifies simple everyday sounds
- Recognizes likenesses and differences in letters and words
- Recognizes rhyming words
- Reproduces simple sounds, letters, and words
- Recognizes beginning sounds in words

Listening Comprehension Skills
Can listen to:

- Determine purpose
- Identify main character
- Identify details
- Identify sequence of details
- Identify relations (cause/effect, comparison, etc.)
- Interpret descriptive language
- Recognize emotion
- Draw inferences
- Anticipate outcome
- Understand opposites (up/down, over/under, etc.)

Visual-Motor Skills

- Coordinates eye-hand movements
- Executes directionality in coordinated eye-hand movements
- Looks at books from front to back consistently
- Looks at rows of information left to right
- Can illustrate his or her own stories appropriately

SUGGESTIONS FOR SOME DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Large Muscle Activities

Tape down a starting line for races and label it *Start*. Have hopping, skipping, jumping, and running races with your child. Use labels for each kind of race. For example, before starting a hopping race display the hopping sign and tell your child it will be a hopping race.

Find pictures in magazines of others involved in large muscle activities and label the pictures for display. For example, for a picture of a man jumping on a trampoline, label a sign *jumping* and hang it under the picture.

Talk with your child as you both enjoy playing. This will expand your child's vocabulary and furnish model sentences, such as, "I really enjoy watching you leap over the boxes like a big frog."

Play word games that involve active movement, like hopscotch, "Here We Go Loby Loo," and "Red Light, Green Light."

Jump or hop or march to rhythms and rhymes.

Block Building

Label creations made with blocks.

Encourage building with blocks. Show appreciation for your child's creations. Occasionally take pictures of your youngster's favorite buildings. Talk about the buildings and pictures while your child is building and later.

Clay or Play-Dough Kneading

Most children naturally love to manipulate clay or play-dough, and like to knead it and talk about how it feels and what they are making. This is an opportunity for you to talk with your child as the child manipulates, kneads, and chatters. Give the youngster a chance to describe and name the objects as they are shaped. Then you make labels using lower case printing to record the exact words of your child and display the objects.

Try these two recipes and enjoy yourself with your child.

Recipe for Play-Dough
1 cup water (can be colored with food coloring)
1 cup flour
2 tbsp. cream of tartar
1/2 cup salt
2 tbsp. cooking oil

Cover over medium heat for up to 7 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from the heat when stiff. (Let it cool at room temperature before letting your child work the play-dough.) After removing it from the heat, knead it until it is smooth. Store it in an airtight container. Let your child help

with the cooking. Encourage the youngster to follow the recipe with you, to choose the color, and talk about what you are doing together. Play dough will last for several months if stored properly.

Recipe for Aggression Cookies (recipe makes 5 dozen)

1 cup brown sugar
1 cup margarine
2 cups oatmeal
1/3 tbsp. baking soda
1 cup flour

Let your child add all ingredients to the mixing bowl with you as you point out each item in this recipe. These cookies must be kneaded for a long time and very thoroughly. The recipe is meant to be a family project. Involve your child is putting the ingredients together, and involve your family in the kneading process. It really works out aggressions and give you all a chance to talk with each other as you knead. The cookies taste good, too!

Bake at 350 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes.

Going Places

Take your child to the zoo, library, museum, on the bus, to the pet shot, etc. Talk with your child about these places and new experiences. Use new words precisely and in conjunction with the experience.

Point out words and letters in road signs, labels, street signs, on mailboxes, in stores, etc.

When you get home encourage your child to draw pictures or tell about where you both went.

Allow your child to collect things from places you've gone. Encourage your youngster to make signs labeling the collection.

Take pictures on the trip. After the film is developed, let your child talk to you about the pictures, writing down what your child says word for word and displaying this with the pictures.

Have your child help you to write *(dictate to you)* a letter to a grandparent or other relative about your experiences. Let your child make a picture of where you went to send with the letter.

Writing Notes and Stories

Write lots of brief notes dictated by your child *(word for word)*. Write them to mom, dad, sister, brother, and friends. Let your child look at the note as you read it out loud, pointing out the words. Let your child deliver or mail the notes.

Encourage your child to make up stories about *everything*. Your child dictates a story, you read it out loud, and if your youngster wants to, read it again and again. Allow your child to illustrate the story and to display it. When visitors come encourage your youngster to *read* the story and picture to them.

Dramatic Activities

Act out stories. Have dress-ups to match story characters.

Make puppets from anything - socks, paper bags, etc. Use the puppets to retell favorite stories. Encourage your child to use puppets to make up and tell original stories.

Let your child set up a stage for the stories. Help your youngster to make signs to label the props, for example, a refrigerator, and oven, etc.

Painting: (Easel, Watercolor Set, Finger Painting)

Allow your child to paint often. Talk about the colors used, so your child becomes familiar with the color names.

Display your child's paintings. Make signs about them, or make titles for them.

Talk about the paintings. If you have a tape recorder, let your child tell about the painting on it. Play back the tape recorder.

HOW TO READ A BOOK TO YOUR CHILD

Reading a book to your child should be a pleasant experience for both of you. It should be a time you and your child can relish together. Use the following list of steps only as a guide to help you and your child develop your own unique way of sharing books.

1. Carefully select a book for your child from a selection of good children's books.
   Or, select several books and let the child choose one from the group.
   Or, allow your child to independently select a book.
   (It is probably best to alternate your methods of selecting the book to be read from the three ways above.)

2. Talk about the book before you begin to read it so that your youngster knows the title, is familiar with the cover, and has been told the author's name. This will allow the child to anticipate the book is someone else's *talk written down*.

3. Read the book to your child, stopping often to point at or talk about different things in the pictures, according the the child's interests.

4. As you read the book, ask questions that your child can answer by looking for clues in the pictures or by making inferences from what has already been read. Allow your child time to answer and praise the comments whenever possible. If you disagree with the answer, ask your youngster about it. If the answer is not at all applicable, talk about other possible answers to the same question.

Be careful not to say, "That's wrong," "You didn't understand," or "No, that's not right."

5. After you have read the book, talk about things in the book with which your child is familiar, or things in which the child is interested.
   Encourage your youngster to talk about the book.

6. Occasionally, allow your child an opportunity to illustrate a favorite part of the book after you have finished reading it. Sometimes let the child verbalize the theme of the book to you and you write down the child's exact words, displaying them with the picture.

7. Very often your child will want to read a favorite book to you. Allow this whenever possible. Do not correct errors. The child is not reading words, but is retelling the story from memory, and this gives you a chance to watch the development of the auditory-memory skills. This practice and opportunity will be very good, providing that you are supportive and don't turn this into a *reading lesson*.

ANSWERS TO SOME COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT READING

As pointed out earlier, each individual parent/child situation is different and should be treated as such. But because some questions are asked so often and by so many parents of preschool and young school-aged children, these questions and answers are included in this booklet.

Should I teach my preschooler to read?

It is not a good idea to deliberately set out to teach your young child to read. If the child is not ready or if it is not done under the proper setting, your youngster might have some negative feelings about reading later on and develop a reading problem.

A child who is ready and able to begin reading should be allowed to do so, but the parent need not do anything other than what has already been suggested in this booklet and be willing to tell the child a word if asked; otherwise, do nothing.

When parents ask me about their preschoolers and what they can do to help them with reading, I recommend that they read as much as possible to their children from a very early age and provide their children with a happy atmosphere for enjoying books to own and read, taking them to the library often, providing them with a bookshelf for their books and a quiet place to read, and showing them that reading is important to you by letting them see their parent reading, too.

When will my first grader learn to read?

Almost all of the activities that are done in the first grade are directed toward developing the skills necessary for reading. There are many opportunities and experiences give to each child that will allow the child to read.

Of course, all children do not respond to these activities in the same way, nor are they all ready to profit from certain types of reading instruction at the same time. Your child is in the process of developing a backlog of necessary experiences and skills; the child is actually learning to read now, and with your confidence and support of the youngster, it will become more and more obvious as time goes on.

What can I do to make my child like reading?

A child can not be made to like reading; trying to force a reading situation on a child would be a bad experience and probably would make matters worse. While a parent can not make a child like reading, a parent can provide an atmosphere conducive to enjoyable reading for the child. The child should be given the opportunity to own and look at a wide variety of children's books. A quiet place for reading should be set up at home. The child should be read to, and trips to the library should be a regular part of the child's life, so that the youngster will have a chance to browse and self-select books and reading materials.

Why aren't my daughter and the neighbor girl, both of whom are in the same class, reading the same book?

Children are given different reading materials based on their individual needs and experiences and skills, rather than on what grade they happen to be in. Children are ready for instruction in different things at different times. Also, children need practice in different skills, and they often work better in one type of reading material than in another. This is why two children in the same class will not necessarily read from the same books.

If my child is having difficulty with reading, shouldn't he/she be bringing work home?

It is not a good idea to overload a child who is having a reading problem with reading homework. The homework would just defeat its own purpose and cause the child to develop more negative feelings about reading. Rather than pressure and drill work, the child would benefit from a relaxed and success-oriented reading approach. Hopefully, that is the approach used at school.

It would probably appear to a child that he or she was being punished for reading problems if the child were given homework that the other children didn't have to do. It is important for you to contact your child's teacher and discuss the total situation. Find out what is being done for your child and ask if there is something you could do to help.

What can we parents do to help our poor readers?

There is much you can do to help. The most important thing you can do is help to reduce any tensions and anxieties your child might have about reading. Let me explain. In order for your child to do his/her best in reading, the child needs to be relaxed, feel good about it, and feel successful. To accomplish this we must not make the youngster feel that there is a reading problem. By emphasizing that you are worried about your child's reading, you call attention to the problem and destroy the relaxed atmosphere that you need to develop.

I feel that the best way to develop this atmosphere is by leaving the reading instruction to the teacher. Work on things at home that will make reading fun, like reading the child stories, going to the library, and listening to stories on records with books to go along with the records.
Your praise and enthusiasm for any reading accomplishments in school or at home will be important. And the confidence you show in your child's teachers and the support you give the teacher will set the stage for your child.

SOME FINAL WORDS

This "How to Help Grow a Reader" booklet has been designed for concerned parents of pre-schoolers and children in the early grades. As pointed out in the beginning, many parents of these children are concerned with their child's pre-reading and beginning reading development. But, all too often, parents of older readers seem to lose their enthusiasm and interest.

Because of this tendency, the key words to remember are *develop* and *grow*. Your young reader will need your ongoing support and interest to continue to develop and sharpen reading, language, and study skills. Even if you've done your early work well, the youngster will still need your encouragement throughout his/her school career. Help your child to keep the growth momentum you've wisely started an ongoing process.

Look over and discuss the papers your youngsters brings home from school. It is a way of showing your interest and concern. Encourage all efforts and accomplishments with a pat on the back. It is a way of indicating your approval and affection.

If you really think reading is important then your child will know it and value it too. The importance you place on reading in your own home is shown by how often you visit libraries, buy books and magazines and read them.

You are your child's model. Your child loves and respects you. What you do, what you approve of, what you encourage, is what the child values. Model well and model long and keep your reader growing. Please don't forget the words *develop* and *grow*.

Parents wanting additional materials and information to help their youngsters with early and later reading development, or lists of books preferred by children, are encouraged to contact the International Reading Association. This worldwide group of reading professionals published materials for parents, free of charge or for a nominal fee. For a complete list and/or copies of these materials, send a self-addressed stamped envelope and a written request to:

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, Delaware 19711

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rona F. Flippo is an Associate Professor of Reading Education at Fitchburg State College. She received her Ed.D. in Reading Education from the University of Florida and has taught at the pre-school, primary, elementary, and college levels. Dr. Flippo has authored several books, and many articles in education literature and professional journals.